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ABSTRACT

Both blacks and whites arriving in Hammond, Indiana in the late 1800s and early 1900s played significant roles in its development. The role of the early black settlers has been largely untold outside the black community and is thus unappreciated. The goal of this project was to change this historical neglect. Statistical data from traditional sources provided limited information, while the use of the manuscript census forms filled out by census workers as they made their rounds and current project oral history interviews provided the internal dynamics and inner realities of black people as history-makers in Hammond. Eighty- and ninety-year-olds recalled the days when blacks could live only in one "designated" area of the city, and when single working blacks lived in a tent city provided by local merchants while saving money to claim a wife. Tales of scandal, tribulation, hard work, and entertainment were intertwined. The project became a source of pride as black residents related tales with honesty and simplicity of various firsts: the first black to buy a house, the first black high school and college graduates, the first black foreman and the first black owner of a local business. That most blacks endeavored to help improve the lives of other blacks is evident. A copy of the questionnaire used to locate possible interviewees and a 28-item bibliography are included. (JB)

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LIVING RESEARCH: ORAL HISTORY IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

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LIVING RESEARCH: ORAL HISTORY IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

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This paper describes the author's research of an insulated ethnic community in the early 1920's and 1930's in Hammond, Indiana through the use of oral history and manuscript census.

Historical Perspective

Indiana became the nation's nineteenth state in 1816. Hammond, located in the northwest corner of the state, was settled in 1868 and was chartered as a city in 1883. During this period, settlers cleared land and began farming. The early nineteen hundreds brought refineries and steel mills to the northern section of the county in which Hammond is located. This created one of the largest industrial centers and a resulting huge growth in population (Moore, 1959; Hammond Daily News, 1904; Hammond Bicentennial, 1976).

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Hammond boasted of a city population of more than 12,000 residents (Hogue, 1986; Woods, 1938; Vargas, 1986). A small percentage of these residents were black. The 1900 census shows 16 plus blacks as residents of Hammond. Typical occupations were hotel cook, butcher, porter, servant, stationery fireman, bricklayer, janitor, stone mason and hostler. The majority of the black residents were single males, average age was 27, and most typical place of birth was a southern state, e.g., six were from Kentucky, and one each from West Virginia, North Carolina, and Mississippi. Several northern states and Canada were also listed as places of birth for these residents. Most black residents or citizens were boarders in homes of local white citizens with one exception. One black is listed as being the owner of his residence (Twelfth Census, 1900).

Research suggests that Hammond's blacks might have been considered a 'community' as early as 1906 when a Walter Hill family moved to Hammond. Oral history reports and other undocumented sources mention this move may have been as early as 1901 (Oral History Interviews #3, #4, #5). Other black families mentioned by name as early residents of the black community are the Payton family who arrived in 1914 and are mentioned as owners of a boarding house, and the Ruffin family who are mentioned as arriving in 1916 from Mississippi (Oral History Interviews #10, #4; Trusty, 1984; Hogue, 1986). By 1920, census records reveal that the city had one hundred thirty seven black citizens. Many of these citizens were single young men who arrived in 1919 to do 'ordinary work' in the local manufacturing companies (Trusty, 1984; Fourteenth Census, 1920). Other studies and historical records reveal that of the 137 black citizens, 40 were black women and only 12 were registered school age children (Moore, 1957; Fourteenth Census, 1920). Trusty (1976) mentions that in the year prior to the census, there had been more than 12 school age black children residing in Hammond but sources intimate that migration into other areas by black residents might be the reason for the small number of school age children recorded by the 1920 census. This is a likely possibility when one considers that Gary and East Chicago, Indiana were both cities with large black populations at this time because of the booming job market in those areas (Thornbrough, 1957; Thornbrough, 1964).

By 1922, local companies and manufacturers began hiring large numbers of black workers (Lyda, 1953). Unfortunately, Hammond already had established incidents of racism so it was easy to segregate, methodically and thoroughly, its black residents. Even the local newspaper, The Times, through its editor, asked,

> "Where will Hammond house the hundred of colored people who are coming to the city to work in its industries and relieve the labor shortage that threatens to cripple production?"

Sensing a black population of 2500 in 1923, The Times stated that "the city must decide where it will have its Black Belt" (The Lake County Times, 1924). This position was quickly endorsed by the Mayor and City Council of Hammond. Thus, a section of Hammond which was a former Eastern European-American conclave was 'designated' as the home community for the black residents of Hammond. Arguments against this action by local blacks and other area residents fell on deaf ears. The term 'designated' was used to avoid a recent (1917) Supreme Court decision which forbid municipal segregation ordinances (Meier et al, 1976). For the Eastern European-Americans residing in the 'designated' area, this decision was appropriate as many of these residents were already moving out of the area and were eager to rent their former homes. 'Quiet pressure' by landlords caused most blacks to move to the 'designated' area. Some black residents were housed in tents prior to securing their residences in this 'designated' area. By 1930, almost all of the six hundred twenty three (623) blacks lived in the 'designated' area which was named East Hammond (Thirteenth Census, 1930; Moore, 1959; Trusty, 1984). Fifty eight years later, most blacks still reside in East Hammond, an insulated ethnic community.

Project Focus

Various local ethnic historians stimulated interest in this project because of a need to re-examine and revitalize the writing of Hammond local history which for the most part, excluded the mention of its black citizens and their contributions. The goal of this project was to collect information, photographs, and other documents which

recorded the historical experiences and achievements of the early black settlers in Hammond. In the absence of adequate written resources or 'paper' records, the project focused on federal manuscript census records and oral history. This research was an attempt to integrate local history as well as apply new techniques to the writing of local history through the utilization of manuscript census records and 'living research' or oral history interviews.

Manuscript Census

'Manuscript Census' refers to the forms that were completed by census workers as they made their rounds. Since 1900, each resident (with the exception of slaves) was recorded by name on a separate line (Barrows, 1973). Detailed recorded information included the following:

1. Location of residence
2. Name
3. Relationship of each person to the head of family
4. Sex
5. Color (white, black, or mulatto) or Race
6. Marital Status
7. Number of years married
8. Mother of how many children, # of those children living
9. Occupation
10. Months not employed
11. Value of real property
12. Place of birth
13. Place of birth of parents
14. Whether attended school (in months)
15. Whether person can read or write
16. Whether person can speak English
17. Naturalization information (Year of immigration; Number of years in U.S.)
18. Owner or Renter of property
19. Farm or Home

As can be seen from the above, manuscript census are an excellent source for developing a valid statistical sketch of a community. These statistics were also used as an 'accuracy' check on the community oral history interviews.

Oral History Interviews

Source information for oral history interviews came from a variety of resources (Burke et al, 1978; Crow, 1987; Lane, 1986; Meyers, 1982). In addition to the manuscript census materials, local newspaper files and printed historical texts were utilized as an information foundation for the project.

The second phase of the project was to locate via questionnaire (see Chart 1), visits to local churches, contacts with local community organizations, and 'word of mouth' meetings in the black community, descendents of early black settlers for oral history interviews and collection of personal records. Preparation for this aspect of the project came from previous workshop training in an oral history project designed to collect information on black women in the Midwest (Hines et al, 1986; Hines, 1981).

Chart 1

Local History Questionnaire

HISTORY OF EARLY BLACK SETTLERS IN HAMMOND PROJECT

YOUR NAME_____

ADDRESS_____TELEPHONE_____CITY_____
PLEASE LET US KNOW THE FOLLOWING:
YOUR AGE RANGE- 35-45___46-55___56-65___66-75___75-85___
WHERE WERE YOU BORN?_____
FROM WHERE DID YOUR PARENTS ORIGINATE?
_____FATHER
_____MOTHER

WHERE WAS YOUR FIRST RESIDENCE IN HAMMOND?_____
HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU LIVED IN HAMMOND?_____
HOW MANY YEARS DID YOUR FAMILY LIVE IN HAMMOND?_____
ARE YOU OR IS YOUR FAMILY AN EARLY SETTLER IN HAMMOND?_____

WHAT IS YOUR FAMILY NAME?_____

WHEN DID YOUR FAMILY COME TO HAMMOND?_____

MAY I TALK WITH YOU ABOUT YOUR HAMMOND EXPERIENCES?_____
THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND COOPERATION!
H. ROSE ADESIYAN

Once individuals were identified, a structured questionnaire which included questions on the 'building blocks' of the community; the kinship ties; church, school and civic affiliations; business enterprises; family life; educational, cultural and recreational institutions; positions of power, influence & leadership within the community; racial relationships; quality of life; political, social, and economic conditions; sexual roles; etc., was devised. A 'free style' interview form was also developed which allowed more spontaneous reflections and comments.

As project activities became more visual in the community, many older non-blacks expressed an interest in documenting their associations via real and 'hear-say' reflections of early days in East Hammond. These reflections were recorded and added to the growing collection of 'living history' interviews. This project of moving black historical experiences into the mainstream of Hammond history was aided by many individuals. One person in particular, Hannah Cherry (a descendent of one of the early families) provided the researcher a list of early family names and addresses of black residents of Hammond who were still living in the region. A second individual, Paul Walker, a local policeman, shared his collection of census information and obituary clippings of black Hammond residents. Such assistance enabled the research to show concretely the historical importance of blacks in Hammond history.

The project is now in its final phase of transcribing the interviews and collaborating with a publishing source. Initially, publication will be in-house.

Results of Project

Every community possesses a rich and diverse ethnic heritage. "Living Research: Oral History in the Black Community" provided a focus and excellent starting point for understanding this heritage in Hammond, Indiana. In the process of this research, it was revealed that one resident, who was a self taught professional pianist, served with a troop of soldiers who proceeded General Pershing in the 1916 Punitive Expedition. Eighty and ninety year old colored (a preferred term) people recalled the days when blacks could only live in one 'designated' block of a street; when the Klu Klux Klan interrupted services in a black church to give a monetary offering to the church minister; and when single working blacks lived in a 'tent city', a residence provided by local merchants, while saving money to claim a wife. Tales of scandals, tribulation, hard work, achievement, and fun were intertwined.

The project became a source of pride as black residents relayed tales, told with honesty and simplicity, of being the first or second to purchase a home even though a 'regulation' had been passed forbidding whites to sell their homes to blacks. Stories of "first blacks" were told; e.g., the first black high school graduate; first music teacher in Lake County; first black foreman; first black sports player on a high school team; first area model & beauty queen, the first black published author; first owner of a local business; and the first college graduate; and, on and on. That most blacks endeavored to help improve the lives of other blacks is evident.

Both blacks and whites arrived in Hammond and played significant roles in its development. The role of the early black settlers in Hammond has, unfortunately, been largely untold outside the black

community and thus, unappreciated. The goal of this project was to change this historical neglect. While statistical data from traditional sources provide limited information, the use of federal manuscript census and oral history interviews can provide the internal dynamics and inner realities of black people as history makers in Hammond. Projects of this nature will add tremendously to the collection of manuscript sources and archival data pertaining to early life in Hammond, Indiana.

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1. Harwell, Lawrence (late 1920's)* age 80+, taped 4/16/88
2. Williams, Press (Presley) (late 1930's) age 100, taped 2/24/88
3. Cherry, Hannah (1919) age 70+, taped 4/15/88
4. Ford, David (1923) age 95, taped 2/12/88
5. London, Helen (born in Hammond, granddaughter of Walter Hill, first black family head) age 40+, taped 2/12/88
6. Moore, Jessie (1930) age 86, taped 3/16/88
7. Marlin, McHelen (1923) age 93, taped 3/16/88
8. Wooley, T. B. (1927) age 84, taped 2/23/88
9. Brooks, Willa (1919) age 74, taped 2/23/88
10. Gamble, Joe (James) (1923) age 89, taped 2/24/88
11. Bunbek, Joe (born in Hammond) age 70+, taped 4/16/88

* (indicates date arrived in Hammond)

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